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C.I.A. and Congress

Ever since the Central Intelligence Agency emerged from the ashes of the old Office of Strategic Services there have been numerous attempts by members of Congress to find out more about its operations and gain more control over them. So far these efforts have not gotten very far and the agency continues to operate and spend money pretty much on its own.

But while C.I.A.'s activities are not accounted for in Congress and are more a subject for speculation than knowledge to the press and the general public, it is not quite true that the agency is outside the government and has itself become an "invisible government." C.I.A. does answer to the National Security Council and, of course, to the President. It has been investigated a number of times since it was set up in 1947, notably by the Hoover Commission and by a task force headed by General Mark Clark. Certain senior members of the Senate and House Armed Services and Appropriations committees are informed (though in general terms) about its annual budget which is hidden in allotments to other agencies.

But this has not been enough for the congressmen who have interested themselves in its activities. Ten years ago Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.), proposed the establishment of a joint House-Senate committee to make "continuing studies of the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency and of problems relating to . . . intelligence affecting the national security." In recent weeks Sen. Stephen M. Young (D-Ohio) submitted a similar bill, and Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy (D-Minn.), has submitted

a bill to set up a special Senate foreign relations sub-committee to study the effect of C.I.A. operations on U.S. foreign relations.

It is probable that these bills, too, will get nowhere, but it does seem time to fill in the legislative branch on C.I.A. activities. It has been 11 years since a Hoover Commission team voiced its concern over the "absence of satisfactory machinery for surveillance of C.I.A." C.I.A. has been blamed for costly intelligence foul-ups in Korea, South America, Cuba and other places. Senator Young has complained that, "wrapped in its cloak of secrecy, the C.I.A. has, in effect, been making foreign policy."

Senator McCarthy has pointed out that, since there has been no formal review of C.I.A.'s activities by Congress in the nearly 20 years of its existence, "it has not been possible to determine whether a valid basis exists for criticism of the agency, or to prevent what appear to be distortions of policy or to dispel rumors surrounding the activities of C.I.A."

In 1955 General Clark's task force commented:

"The fate of the nation well may rest on accurate and complete intelligence data which may serve as a trustworthy guide for top-level governmental decisions on policy and action in a troubled world where so many forces and ideologies work at cross purposes."

The comment is still valid. For that reason, and for the reasons cited by Senator Young and Senator McCarthy, there should be limited Congressional surveillance of C.I.A.'s activities.